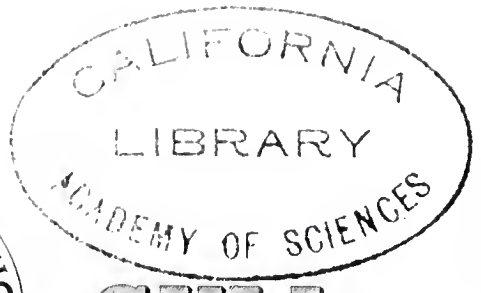


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# THE

MONTHLY



# GULL

BULLETIN

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**AUGUST MEETING:** The next regular meeting of the Association will be held on Thursday evening, the 11th inst., at eight o'clock, in the Board Room of the State Board of Harbor Commissioners, Ferry Building, 2nd Floor, Room 19.

The evening will be devoted to vacation experiences, and many of our members will have gathered material for very interesting accounts. Everyone is urged to attend and to contribute something to the program.

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**AUGUST FIELD TRIP** will be taken on Sunday, August 14th, to Fairfax and over the old grade to Bon Tempe and the head of Alpine Lake, returning via Lake Lagunitas and the fish grade to Ross, a distance of about ten miles.

Purchase round trip ticket to Fairfax, 60c, and take Sausalito ferry leaving foot of Market St. at 8:15 a. m. Bring lunch and canteen.

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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE JULY MEETING:** The one hundred twenty-fourth regular meeting of the Association was held on July 14th, in the Board Room of the State Board of Harbor Commissioners with Dr. Frederick W. D'Evelyn, President, in the chair; Mrs. Carl Smith, Secretary.

Dr. D'Evelyn entertained those present with a most interesting account of the "Aasvogels—Scavengers of the Veld." Dr. D'Evelyn said in part:

**AASVOGEL**—is a word of Voortrekker days, being of Boer origin. "Aas" is a derivative from "Aazen" to prey; "Vogel" bird—"Gewone Aasvogel", the common Vulture. In pioneer days when the veld was overrun by larger antelope and other big game, the carnivora preying upon them did not consume all of what they killed. Again, tribal and other wars provided dead horses, oxen and other dead things. Later the hide-hunter left his "kills" simply to dry up on the veld. In those times of surplus food Aasvogels in great hordes swarmed to the abundant repast, fed sumptuously and literally cleaned camp. But lean days fell upon their being. The advance of civilization, disappearance of game, newer sanitation. Carrion became scarcer and with its limitation the Aasvogel and its minor accomplice, the Withals Kraai, the white-necked Raven, found their rations seriously curtailed.

Profound changes in natural conditions inexorably induce new habits in the fauna of a country. Our carrion feeders degenerated and took to

killing lambs, sickly sheep, calves. Accordingly the aasvogels were no longer honored or protected. We, however, knew them at their best and will ever remember with a romantic sympathy those great uncouth, unfragrant, sky-rovers as star-performers in the alluring drama of the ever changing panorama of veld life. Big birds, rufous-brown plumage, primaries and tail feathers black, strong, hooked beak, head and neck naked. Their nesting and roosting places Krantzies or mountain peaks. The nest a mass of sticks, often of considerable size, limitedly lined with dry grass. Only one egg is laid, in color dirty white, sometimes spotted; incubation in July and August.

Many a time and oft, when on the passes of the Berg, or far-climbed amongst the cliffs on all night vidette duty, have we seen the day dawn and the mountain peaks grow crimson in the newly caught rays of the rising sun. As we gazed and the light strengthened, ever and anon grey masses appeared to break away from the peaks and drop into space; then wings would unfold as the feathered aces swept round in widening circles, ever soaring, ever climbing, until they were lost in the upper reaches. From the plain several hundred feet below the birds would be invisible. Later, with the aid of field glasses, tiny specks might be recovered. These specks were aasvogels. With still more powerful glasses, fainter specks might be detected; only to be finally lost, until the great vault of sky appeared, not alone untraversed by cloud, but absolutely void and untenanted. However, let a sick ox drop out of the span, or a horse be shot,—the entire scene changes. From above, from all directions, objects would come into view, as in great circular rushes, on ever descending wing, the aasvogels would swoop down, nearer and nearer, until they would alight in a great circle around the prostrate animal. Some of the birds would at times literally drop out of the sky, thousands of feet, and stone-like, fall downwards until within a hundred feet or so from the veld, when the great wings would unfold just in time to break their fall as they landed within a few feet of the carcass. It is generally conceded that the aasvogel locates its prey by power of sight and not by smell. From personal observation this would seem to be a correct conclusion, as we have seen instances where carcasses have been concealed by brush or surrounding rocks, quite untouched by the birds, while nearby carcasses were denuded to the bone.

Once alight, whether on veld or nearby boulder, then would come a waiting period to find out how much, if any, life remained within their anticipated spoil. Oftentimes from nearby points of cover have we watched their actions. Silent, solemn, but alert, they would wait, often for quite lengthy periods. Then they would advance to the onslaught. There might be a score or a hundred birds in action. The scene that followed was fascinating, ghastly, gruesome. The birds flapping their great wings, screaming in their excitement their heads and necks gory with blood; the sounds of rending flesh, as great ribbons were torn from the carcass, the simulated movements of life as it was jerked hither and thither by the struggling birds, all combined to stage a nature demonstration not readily forgotten. The rapidity with which they denuded the body of an ox or a horse was astonishing. On your return at eventide you would find the animal you had outspanned at noon simply a denuded and eviscerated skeleton, glowing red as the setting sun shone through the gory lattice of the vaulted ribs. Around, the veld was strewn with feathers, blood, offal, while a few feet away sits a group of indifferent, over-gorged birds, so sluggish that it seemed you could knock them over with your whip or ride them down with your horse,—closer contact was neither prudent nor inviting.

In times of war or animal epidemics when food was super-abundant, it was no uncommon doing for the birds to shuffle over to the nearest water,

drink liberally, then disgorge their "dainties" and return to a second helping with all the avidity of their earlier appetite and appreciation. At times a solitary bird might be seen feeding on a carcass, with select and dignified behavior; or again, a number of aasvogels might be already neck-deep in their enjoyment, when a new arrival would wing his advent into the scene, and the feeding birds would at once withdraw. The lone feeder or the new arrival was the Koning Aasvogel, the King Aasvogel, or Black Vulture. The King, invariably in his primary attack, pecked out the eyes and tongue of his victim. This demonstration of ornithological etiquette is strangely unique,—plebian democracy sitting afar off, hungry, silent, subdued. The Raven possibly saves the ticket, being pre-eminently communistic. It begins to feed as soon as it arrives, giving no heed to royalty, even less to its victim's feelings, simply driving home its spear-like beak, provided the victim is "dead" enough to lie quiet and not "object."

We must, however, include the special reference made to the "new habits"—on the part of the great Sprinkhaanvogel, better known as the White Stork. The Stork of German "baby" fame was specially interesting. As is well known, the "baby" bringer is a summer migrant to South Africa, breeding chiefly in Holland and Germany. This bird, finding conditions on the plateau of Kenya Colony—(Lake Victoria, Uganda and Tanganyika areas)—so conducive to its comfort and well-being, is ceasing to be migratory and becoming an all-year resident.



### BIRDS OF THE PACIFIC STATES

The above is the title of Mr. Ralph Hoffmann's new book which will be found most helpful in the identification of birds in the field. In the use of scientific names the A. O. U. Check List has been followed. The arrangement of families and sub-families is that of the new check list, not yet published. The book has been reviewed in the *Auk* and the *Condor*. The same is now available at Newbegin's in San Francisco. Price five dollars.



**THE JULY FIELD TRIP** was taken on Sunday, July 17th, to Golden Gate Park. Mr. Carl Smith was to lead the trip but was compelled to leave soon after we assembled, and he appointed Mrs. Mexia as leader.

Our first surprise was when Carl Smith introduced us to Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson, president of the National Audubon Society and informed us that Dr. Pearson was to accompany us on the walk. I think that we were somewhat timid at first to call out birds when we saw them but Dr. Pearson made us feel right at home and we soon acted as if we had known him all of our lives. The main regret of the group was that we had such a small list of birds to show him, but the heavy fog that hung over the park may have been the reason so few birds were seen.

The party congregated at the 43rd St. entrance to the Chain of Lakes and followed the usual course, visiting the two northerly lakes. Here we saw numerous warblers, one, a yellow warbler feeding its young. A ruddy duck in gay colors interested Dr. Pearson very much. After leaving these lakes we crossed the old speedway to another small lake where we had our lunch and afterward prevailed upon Dr. Pearson to give us a talk. We enjoyed it very much and after he had finished we had a regular round table discussion, without, of course, the table, as Dr. Pearson happened to be seated on a stump and the rest of the party on various Golden Gate Park rocks made of cement. We next walked to the Japanese Tea Garden where the party broke up.

## THE GULL

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Dr. Pearson sketched out the history of the Audubon Society from the time when it was first started by Dr. Geo. Bird Grinnell in 1886 and 1887, when it passed out of existence until 1902, being established in that year again. In 1905 it was incorporated as the National Audubon Society; and since that time Dr. Pearson has been officially connected with it.

He gave us a brief outline of the work the Audubon Society has done or is doing. He mentioned the Junior Audubon Clubs with a membership of 356,000 in the United States and Canada; spoke of the various laws for protection of non-game birds, and of preventing sale of bird feathers and skins; and of the establishing of bird reservations in various parts of the United States; of the interesting monograph studies of habits and distribution of birds which are issued by the Society at the nominal cost of five cents each, to the purchaser.

His description of the twelve-acre Roosevelt grave sanctuary was very interesting; and he showed us a photograph of the bronze figure bird fountain there.

The talk on the P. J. Rainey bird reservation with its forty-two square miles of area made us open our eyes to the possibilities of bird protection at this time when bird feeding grounds are being slowly drained and put under cultivation. Dr. Pearson ended his talk with some experiences he has had in visiting various lakes and islands, and in catching law violators who have tried to smuggle in bird feathers and skins or ducks out of season; and of his trip to Europe in bird conservation work.

Birds encountered were Western sandpiper and Hudsonian curlew(?) along the Oakland tide flats; western and California gulls, and Farallone cormorant on the bay. In Golden Gate Park: common mallard, ruddy duck; American coot, coast California quail; Allen humming bird, black phoebe, yellow-bellied western flycatcher, California linnet, green-backed Arkansas goldfinch, Nuttall white-crowned sparrow, junco, Santa Cruz song sparrow, lutescent orange-crowned, California yellow and golden pileolated warblers; chestnut-backed chickadee; Pacific coast bush-tit; Pacific russet-backed thrush; western robin. Twenty-four species.

Besides Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson, members in attendance were: The Misses Boegle and Shroeder; Mesdames Bracelin and Mexia; Dr. Card, Messrs. Bunker, Lastreto and Smith. As guests: The Misses Belvel, Harman, Nicol, Pollard, Krejefski; Mesdames Bunker, Lockerbie and Stevens; Messrs. Lockerbie and Stevens; Carlo and Philip Lastreto and three other guests who left before listing their names. Nine members and fifteen guests.

PAUL F. BUNKER, *Historian*.

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## AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

FOR THE STUDY AND THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS

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Meets second Thursday of each month at 8:00 p.m., in the Board Room of the State Board of Harbor Commissioners, Ferry Building, Second Floor, Room 19.

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